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Fenwick Mines

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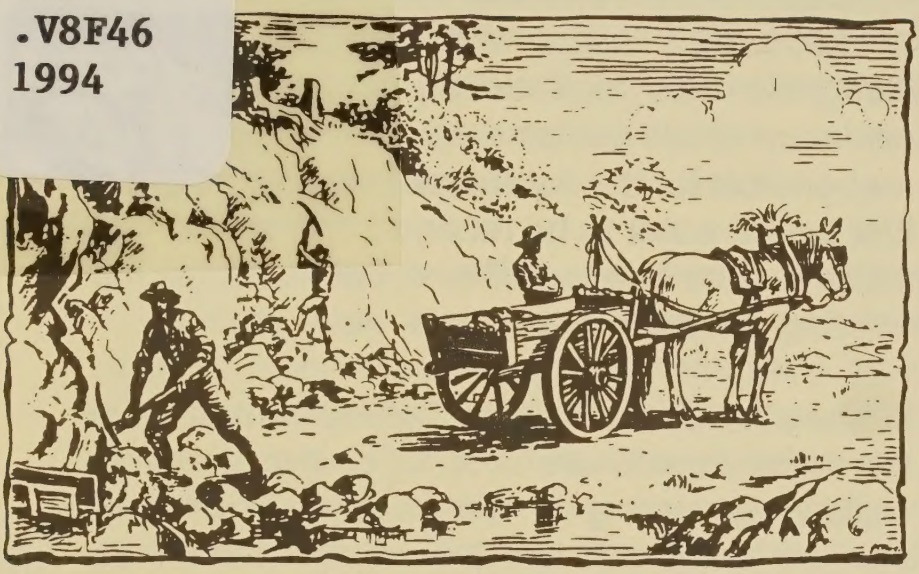


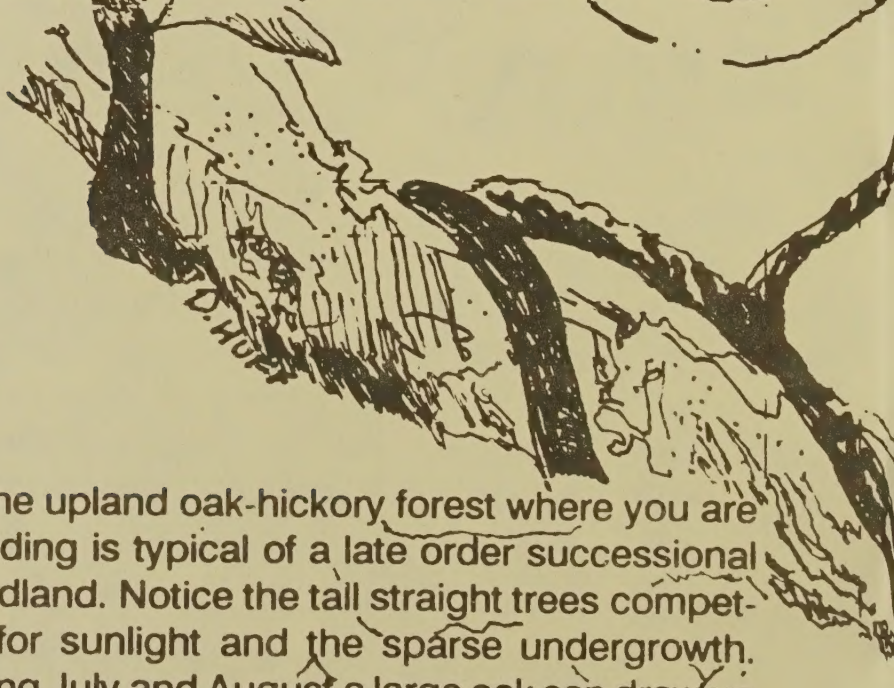
Wetlands Trail

The Fenwick Mines Wetlands Trail offers accessibility, diversity, history and environmental education in a setting of natural and man-made beauty. Located 6 miles east of the Town of New Castle off of Virginia State Route 615, the Fenwick Mines Wetlands Trail is a vital component of the Fenwick Mines Recreation Area on the New Castle Ranger District. Other amenities at Fenwick Mines include accessible rest rooms, picnic shelters, fishing, and unorganized game fields. For additional information about this and other forest opportunities, please contact the New Castle Ranger District, P.O. Box 246, New Castle, Virginia 24127, Phone (703) 864-5195.

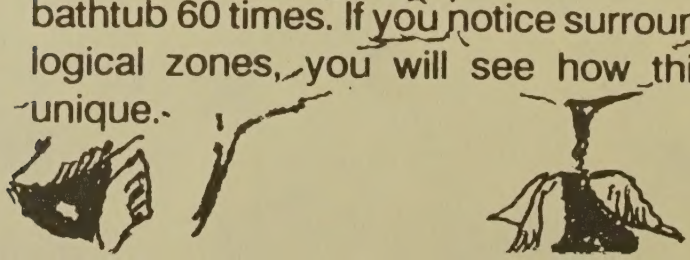
NUMBERS REFER TO INTERPRETIVE MARKERS LOCATED ON THE TRAIL.

1. This sculpture is representative of the thriving iron-mining community that existed on this site from the late 1890's until the mid-1920's. Hundreds of people lived here and worked the nearby mines. Iron ore is also responsible for most of the nearby settlements. As you progress along the trail, look closely and you will see evidence of this settlement; the mining activity is responsible for the creation of the earthen dikes that cause water to be retained on the site. This water is what makes Fenwick Mines such a fascinating environment.

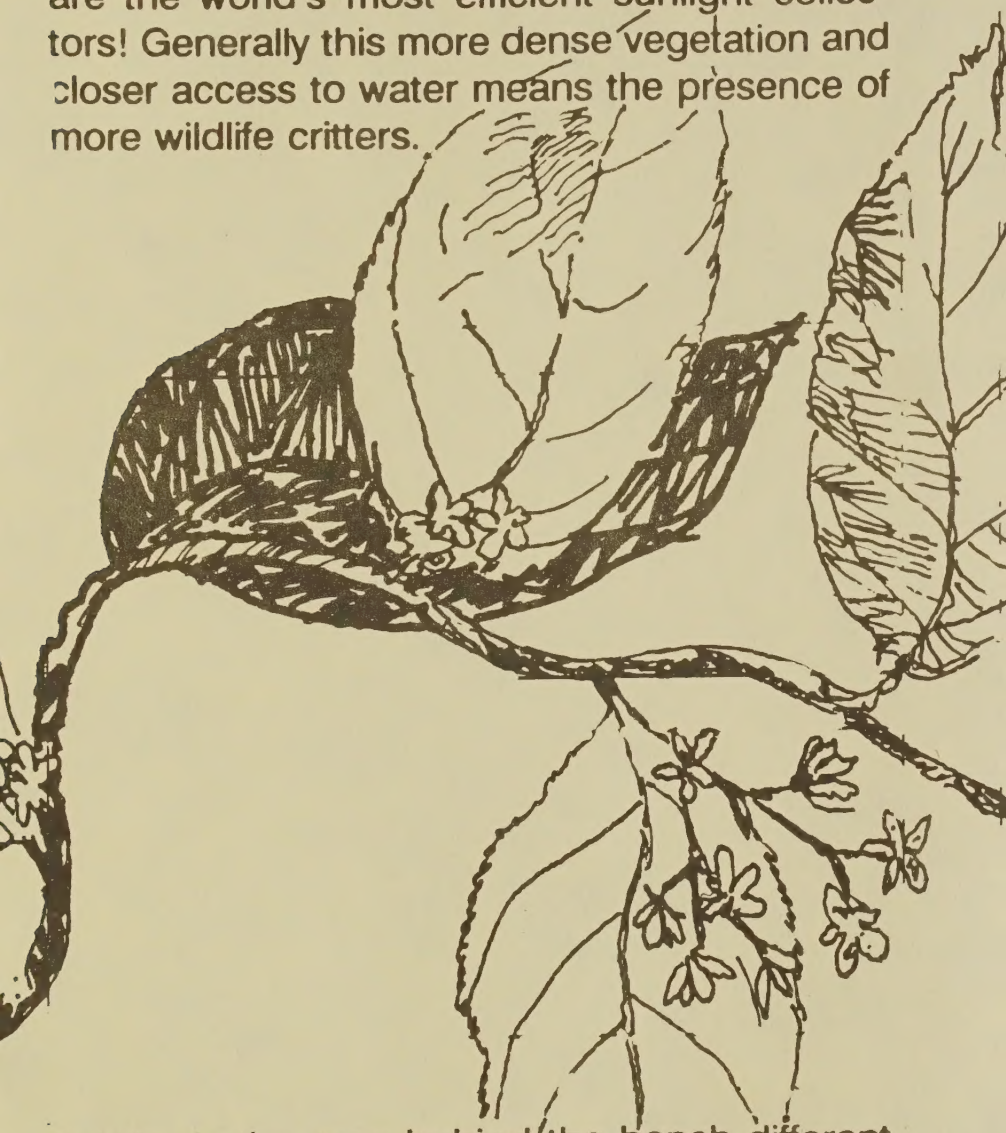
2. The abundant wildlife at Fenwick is a result of this moisture-rich landscape. From microscopic organisms lurking in the mud to frogs, fish, beaver, hawk and fox, the wildlife are all dependent on clean water and on each other for livelihood. Fenwick Mines is the only site on the New Castle Ranger District that is included in the Virginia Watchable Wildlife Viewing Guide. Remain quiet and take a look around--you will see wildlife or evidence of its presence.



3. The upland oak-hickory forest where you are standing is typical of a late order successional woodland. Notice the tall straight trees competing for sunlight and the sparse undergrowth. During July and August a large oak can draw up to 3,000 gallons of water out of the ground a day! That is enough water to fill an average bathtub 60 times. If you notice surrounding ecological zones, you will see how this area is unique.



4. As you cross this bridge you leave the mesic area and enter the hydric woodland or swamp. In addition to smaller and much thicker vegetation, the soil and its water content is more dense. The evergreen understory indicates more sunlight reaches the forest floor. Broadleaf evergreen species, such as laurel, are the world's most efficient sunlight collectors! Generally this more dense vegetation and closer access to water means the presence of more wildlife critters.



5. Why is the area behind the bench different from the other areas of the trail? The undergrowth is much heavier, the trees are smaller or younger and there is generally more pine species. This is an early successional growth indicating some force recently removed the larger older trees allowing more sunlight to reach the ground. The force could have been fire, wind, or ice; but, in this case, timber harvesting was involved as part of the process. Be aware of the benefits that human interaction with the natural process can provide to wildlife, varied ecological systems, and watershed protection.

6. A swamp is a wetland containing trees, and a marsh is a wetland without trees. Does that mean a swamp may be an older wetland, or that wetland inhabitants (including vegetation) come in many forms? As you stand on the transition between swamp and marsh, how does wind affect the size of the marsh? This zone is the richest area at Fenwick as far as wildlife is concerned, and circles the entire marsh. Here, food and cover are most readily available. What are the foods and who do they feed?

American Bittersweet
Celastrus scandens

7. Notice the highly specialized mat of plants that can withstand periodic submersion and acts as the most efficient water cleaning/ filtration system known to man. That is why wetlands are one of the most important ecosystems in the world. Newts, salamanders, snails, frogs and small fish thrive in the water, and can even survive below ground when no water is readily apparent during times of drought. These little animals are the basis of the world's food chain.

8.Living and dying--the world's great land builder. As plants and animals live, grow and die, wetlands gradually fill in, become a meadow, and later a forest. If a beaver, or a human, builds a dam to create a pond or lake, and that pond or lake remains undisturbed, it will eventually fill with sediment and decomposing plant and animal matter--thus, becoming a wetland. Is dam building bad or good, and why?

9. Now look up and far away. In the distance you may see Bald Mountain. How can something so far away be so important to this wetland? The soil nutrients of this area came from the natural erosion and weathering of Bald Mountain and by Mill Creek's ability to transport these nutrients to Fenwick Mines. Also, the mining activities of humans accelerated this deposition of soil and allowed Fenwick Mines wetlands to form. How do human activities benefit our landscape in a long-term way?

10. The big picture at Fenwick Mines is that this is predominately a human-created environment that has been allowed to develop naturally. Benefits are obviously good. This miniature landscape incorporates the natural systems occurring all over the world. How can we begin to understand that what we do on a daily basis may affect the surface of the earth 100 or even 1,000 years from now?

11. This pond contains warm-water fish species that are at the top of the aquatic food chain. They may be consumed by humans or other animals, or they may grow old and die to become a part of the fabric of a future wetland. If they are removed and consumed, how does their story continue?

12. Mill Creek is the artery that feeds and supports the area you are now leaving. Notice the red-orange color evident in places. Is the presence of iron ore in this water significant to Fenwick Mines? How does the presence of iron in this area affect nature? The local community? You?

As you continue on your journey, please take with you everything you brought in; and, perhaps you will take with you a different viewpoint of how you might affect the world around you. Good journey!

NEW CASTLE RANGER DISTRICT
Box 246
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